

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-16

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R 221339Z AUG 74

FM AMCONSUL JERUSALEM

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 6026

INFO AMEMBASY AMMAN

AMEMBASSY BEIRUT

AMEMBASSY CAIRO

AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS

AMEMBASSY ROME

AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV

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E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: PING, IS, JO

SUBJ: DEVELOPMENTS IN ARCHBISHOP CAPUCCI ARREST CASE

REF: JERUSALEM 1598

1. SUMMARY. EMISSARIES FROM GREEK CATHOLIC MIDDLE EAST SYNOD ARRIVED IN JERUSALEM AUG 21 TO LOOK INTO CASE OF ARCHBISHOP CAPUCCI, ARRESTED BY GOI AUG 18 ON SUSPICION OF SMUGGLING ARMS FOR TERRORISTS. LOCAL ARAB REACTION IS HIGHLY CRITICAL OF ISRAELIS, RANGING FROM CHARGES THAT CAPUCCI FRAMED BY AUTHORITIES TO EXPRESSIONS OF DISBELIEF HIGH CHURCH OFFICIAL WOULD ENGAGE IN SUCH ACTIVITIES. APOSTOLIC DELEGATE AND ATTORNEY HAVE VISITED CAPUCCI, WHO REPORTEDLY BEING HELD AT BEIT SHEMESH. END SUMMARY.

2. ARCHBISHOP BOULOS ASHKAR OF LATAKIA, SYRIA, AND TWO ASSISTANTS, MSGR. BUTNES SAMA'AN AND MSGR. HABIB BASHA, ARRIVED JERUSALEM AUG 21, HAVING BEEN SENT BY GREEK CATHOLIC

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MIDDLE EAST SYNOD, NOW IN SESSION IN BEIRUT, TO LOOK INTO

CAPUCCI CASE. ACCORDING TO PRESS AND RADIO, AFTER CONFERRING WITH APOSTOLIC DELEGATE WILLIAM CAREW, THEY MET AUG 22 WITH DR. SHAUL COLBI, DIRECTOR OF CHRISTIAN AFFAIRS IN RELIGIOUS AFFAIRS MINISTRY, AND WERE TO VISIT CAPUCCI IN BEIT SHEMESH PRISON (WEST OF JERUSALEM) SAME AFTERNOON. ASHKAR TOLD PRESS HE IS HERE TO PROBE CIRCUMSTANCES OF ARREST AND TO "DO WHATEVER HAS TO BE DONE IN CONNECTION WITH THIS CASE, AND EXTEND ANY POSSIBLE ASSISTANCE" TO CAPUCCI. HE ALSO SAID HE MAY REPLACE CAPUCCI TEMPORARILY IN JERUSALEM.

3. CAREW WAS PERMITTED TO VISIT CAPUCCI AUG 20. PROMINENT RAMALLAH ATTORNEY AZIZ SHEHADEH HAS ALSO SEEN HIM ONCE IN COMPANY OF POLICE OFFICIALS AND ACCORDING TO PRESS PLANNED TO CONFER WITH HIM PRIVATELY AUG 22. (SHEHADEH IS RESPECTED WEST BANK LAWYER WHO ALSO ON GOOD TERMS WITH ISRAELIS.)

4. POLICE HAVE REVEALED NO FURTHER INFO RE EVIDENCE IN CASE BUT ARE REPORTED IN PRESS TO ANTICIPATE CONCLUSION OF INTERROGATION OF ARCHBISHOP "WITHIN A COUPLE OF DAYS" AND EARLY PREPARATION OF CHARGE SHEET. CAPUCCI SAID TO BE COOPERATING IN INVESTIGATION AND NO FURTHER ARRESTS MAKE.

5. LOCAL PRESS HAS CARRIED REPORTS OF VATICAN AUG 19 STATEMENT EXPRESSING HOPE "SAD CASE" WILL BE "CLARIFIED IN SATISFACTORY MANNER" ALONG WITH SPECULATION THAT VATICAN CAUTION DICTATED BY RELATIVELY INDEPENDENT STATUS OF GREEK CATHOLIC CHURCH AND CONCERN THAT CASE NOT JEOPARDIZE VATICAN'S DESIRE FOR INTERNATIONAL GUARANTEES FOR HOLY PLACES IN JERUSALEM. PATRIARCH MAXIMUS' STRONG CRITICISM OF ISRAELI ACTION ALSO FEATURED.

6. ACCORDING TO LOCAL ARABIC PRESS SEVERAL WEST BANK MUNICIPALITIES AND CIVIC ORGANIZATIONS HAVE SENT PROTESTS TO GOI OFFICIALS OVER CAPUCCI'S ARREST. ARAB REACTION IS UNANIMOUS IN CRITICIZING ISRAELI ACTION, MOST EXTREME CHARGING THAT ARMS WERE "PLANTED" IN ARCHBISHOP'S CAR IN ORDER TO DISCREDIT WELL-KNOWN ARAB NATIONALIST AND CHRISTIAN CHURCHES IN GENERAL. (IT IS NOTED THAT OUTSIDE WITNESS NOT PRESENT DURING SEARCH OF CAR; CAREW TOLD ME HE CONSIDERED THIS TACTICAL MISTAKE ON ISRAELIS' PART). MOST EXPRESS DISBELIEF THAT SUCH HIGH-RANKING CHURCHMAN REGARDLESS OF HIS STRONG NATIONALIST SENTIMENTS, WOULD LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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ENGAGE IN ACTIVITIES OF WHICH HE SUSPECTED.

7. PRESS HAS ALSO REPORTED STATEMENT SAID TO HAVE BEEN MADE BY HAIFA ARCHBISHOP RAYA, ATTENDING SYNOD IN BEIRUT, THAT IS INCONCEIVABLE ISRAELIS WOULD ARREST CLERGYMAN UNLESS CHARGES WELL-FOUNDED. SOME ARABS EXPRESS DOUBT RAYA WOULD HAVE MADE SUCH STATEMENT WHILE IN BEIRUT, ALTHOUGH HE GENERALLY CONSIDERED PRO-ISRAELI.

8. FOR BEIRUT. PLEASE INCLUDE JERUSALEM AS ADDRESSEE ON
MESSAGES THIS SUBJECT.
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